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ABSTRACT

Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), ICW Employment Services of Indiana County, ARIN Intermediate Unit #28, and Indiana County Vo-Tech cooperated in a 1-year pilot project to explore employment opportunities for rural high school seniors with mild disabilities. These agencies created a four-tier program that included job preparation, job shadowing, job coaching, and paid internships. Ten special education students participated in the 5-month pilot program. Quantitative assessment data were collected via a follow-up survey of students and employers. Qualitative data were collected in seven areas: policymaker awareness, attitude change, project replication, barriers to employment, impact on pre-professional educators, infrastructure development, and status of project goals. Based on the number of outgrowth activities that resulted and on positive feedback from the collaborative partners, students, and parents, the pilot project was deemed very successful. Four of five project goals were met: expanding employers' awareness of the potential contributions of employees with disabilities, training future special education teachers and other related professionals at IUP, improving students' job readiness skills, and increasing interagency collaboration in this area. Recommendations are offered for program development and replication. Three appendices present survey results, meeting agendas, and media associated with the program. (TD)

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A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

FEBRUARY 2000

The Improvement of Employment Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Upon High School Graduation in Rural Settings

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE i

ABSTRACT ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

PROJECT SUMMARY 1

Background 1

Need and Literature Review 5

Project Goals and Objectives 8

Research Methodology 10

RESULTS 10

Policymaker Awareness 10

Attitude Change 11

Replication of Project 13

Barriers to Employment 14

Impact on Pre-Professionals 16

Infrastructure Development 18

Status of Project Goals 19

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 20

REFERENCES 24

APPENDICES

The Improvement of Employment Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Upon High School Graduation in Rural Settings

A report by
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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

This project was sponsored by a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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ABSTRACT

In 1975 the federal government passed legislation (PL 94-142) mandating a "free and appropriate public education" be provided to students with disabilities. In 1990, the federal government reiterated their commitment to students with disabilities by passing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 101-476: IDEA). The most recent piece of legislation requires schools to provide appropriate transition services for children with disabilities while they are in high school. Transition services should be individualized and address the specific needs of the individual with a disability. Furthermore, if implemented correctly, transition services are to provide a natural link to post-high school activities for the young adult. Prior to 1990 many schools did not consider what the student would be engaged in (e.g., postsecondary education, supported employment) upon high school graduation. The transition component written into IDEA is an attempt to rectify this situation.

Many high schools have done an admirable job of preparing youngsters with disabilities for post-high school endeavors. In particular, schools throughout the Commonwealth provide community based instruction for students with moderate and severe disabilities. These activities take the student into the community to practice skills learned in the classroom, an excellent mechanism to help these students generalize information. However, schools often neglect to consider the unique needs of students with mild disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities) relative to transition. The educational needs of these students are not as evident because their disabilities are not as severe. In addition, their disability is hidden and their physical attributes are similar to that of a typical high school student without a disability. However, the academic problems students with learning disabilities exhibit impact the student inside the classroom just as much as they do outside the classroom. Finally, these students, if they reside in rural communities within

the state of Pennsylvania, are faced with a limited number of job opportunities. There are ample job opportunities for the high school student who resides in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. However, if the student lives in a rural county of the state, the options are limited.

Based on the scenario outlined above, funding was provided to Indiana University of Pennsylvania to conduct a one-year pilot project. Four entities in a rural area of Pennsylvania formed a collaborative partnership to explore employment opportunities for students with mild disabilities. These agencies developed and implemented a program that a) taught students job preparation skills, b) provided students with job shadowing experiences, and c) provided on-the-job support for students at a paid internship site. The results of the pilot project were encouraging and recommendations have been made for different agencies in the Commonwealth to explore to enhance the post-high school outcomes for students with mild disabilities.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The final report for the project titled: *The Improvement of Employment Opportunities for High School Students with Disabilities Upon Graduation in Rural Settings* is divided into three major sections. The first section, contains the following four subsections: (a) background, (b) need and literature review, (c) project goals and objectives, and (d) research methodology.

Background

In October, 1997, The Center for Rural Pennsylvania provided funding to Indiana University of Pennsylvania to explore the employment barriers that exist for high school students with mild disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities) in rural settings. At the time of the award, limited services were being provided to this student population because of the barriers identified below. Upon notification of the award, the Project Director, Dr. Kent Jackson, brought together four separate agencies in Indiana County that could improve the services offered to the identified population. The four agencies involved in this project included: the Department of Special Education and Clinical Services at IUP, ICW Employment Services of Indiana County, ARIN Intermediate Unit #28, and Indiana County Vo-Tech. This collaborative group met and created a plan to provide a four-tier program for high school seniors with mild disabilities. The four-tier program included: job preparation, job shadowing, job coaching, and paid internships.

Ten students were selected to go through the program. To be selected for the initial phase, job preparation phase, it was necessary for students to satisfy specific criteria. Students were required to be high school seniors with a diagnosis of a learning disability. The students also had to be considered high functioning. In terms of this specific selection criteria, high functioning was defined as demonstrating average letter grades (i.e; those which fell within the

"A" to "C" range) and not demonstrating current academic difficulties and emotional/behavioral problems.

The profile of the 10 students identified for the initial Job Preparation phase are high school seniors who are enrolled in special education programs within their respective schools. The students are classified as having a learning disability; therefore, they possess average intelligence while at the same time experience academic problems in one or more of the following academic areas: reading, math, oral communication, written communication, and/or listening. Additionally, these students demonstrate mild deficits in self-confidence and social competence as determined by a certified special educator. An overview of the 10 day job preparation curriculum is listed below:

Days One & Two--	Prepare personal information to locate job leads from a variety of sources
Days Three & Four--	Complete an application form/blank
Days Five & Six--	Prepare a resume & cover letter
Days Seven & Eight--	Prepare for a job interview
Days Nine & Ten--	Complete a job interview & write a thank you letter

Once students completed the job preparation phase, they then went into the next phase which involved job shadowing. Each student was given the opportunity to shadow three different work sites. Each of the work sites were chosen in relationship to the student's employment interest and skills. The student was given the opportunity to observe and ask questions at any given time during shadowing. The employers used for shadowing were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Each student was interviewed to determine interest and skills.

2. Sites were then looked at that related back to the student's area of competencies.

3. Three sites were selected for each student. All sites offered different aspects of their career field, but all three being in the same employment category. For example, a student desiring food service experience was placed at IUP's cafeteria where they learned about preparation and services relative to the cafeteria. They were also placed at a dining room at Holiday Inn to learn about similar but also different types of food preparation. Finally, the student was placed at Giant Eagle to learn about delicatessen food preparation.

4. The employers indicated an interest with being a part of the process.

5. Businesses were assessed on how well they could communicate necessary skills to the students in order to ensure the student is able to understand all aspects of the work site.

The shadow experience gave the students a realistic introduction to the world of work. The ultimate goal of the job shadowing activity was for each student to understand the connection between school, work, and his/her specific employment goals for the future.

The following are outcomes and accomplishments reached by the end of the shadowing process. The students were able to:

1. begin to identify career interests

2. gain an awareness of the academic, technical, and personal skills required by particular jobs

3. develop and apply communication skills by interacting with employers and workers at the shadowing site

4. identify existing skills and the lack of future planning in employment and/or education

The final two phases included job coaching and a paid internship for the student participant. A job coach accompanied each student to the job site to provide support. Initial

support was intensive. However, as the student learned about the nuances of the job, the coach support was faded. Each student received an average of 50 hours of job coaching. Because it was felt job coaching was a crucial component of the project, details of job coaching are listed below:

The purpose of the job coaches and graduate student is to represent and train students with mild learning disabilities in all aspects needed and expected at any chosen work site. The term job coach will be used generically as the graduate student essentially performed all of the same tasks as job coaches involved in this grant. It should also be noted that job coaches were involved in all aspects of the project; including: pre-employment, shadowing, and internships. In addition, the job coach was essential in securing transportation to/from the work site. Listed below are competencies needed for job coaches:

1. Job coaches must be able to respond to the unique components of a variety of community based work settings. These include: dress codes, behavior, jargon, culture of the work site, and social skills.

2. Job coaches must be able to capture all the requirements and needs of a particular job (i.e., job analysis). The analysis must include all related and subtle skills that affect the student's job performance.

3. Job coaches must be willing to participate actively at the work site whenever necessary to ensure the meeting of the production criterion, and to encourage the employee (student) to assume gradually increasing job responsibilities.

4. Job coaches must be able to facilitate relationships between the co-workers, supervisors, and the student. This activity might well be the most vital one for ensuring success.

5. Job coaches must strike a balance between the needs of the worker and the degree of cooperation and assistance available at each individual work site.

6. Job coaches must be able to "trouble-shoot" problems that occur at work sites, such as: production problems, the method of performing tasks, relationships with co-workers, boredom, frustration, and attendance.

In addition to the six areas identified above, the graduate student must:

1. Must be trained with the job coaches.
2. Understand all aspects of the project.
3. Be able to teach pre-employment classes to students.
4. Meet and know all students.
5. Create appropriate case-notes on students during shadowing and coaching.
6. Know all agencies involved.
7. Assist in the assessment process.
8. Complete follow-up activities.

The four-tier program (i.e., job preparation, job shadowing, job coaching, and paid internships) occurred over a five month period. The principal investigator would encourage that in the future, these activities occur over the full nine-month academic year. However, this was not possible for this project because of the pre-implementation activities that were needed.

Need and Literature Review

In 1990 the federal government passed legislation requiring schools to more closely examine how they serve students with disabilities in public schools (PL 101-476: IDEA). As a result of this law schools have been required to develop transition plans for students with special needs to prepare them for life after high school. The PA State Standards and Regulations for

Special Education is the state interpretation of IDEA and currently requires transition planning to begin no later than age 16 for students with disabilities. These plans have been implemented for many students with moderate and severe disabilities (e.g., students with Down Syndrome and students with significant cognitive deficits) because of outside agency involvement. However, for students with mild disabilities (e.g., students with learning disabilities: dyslexia, dyscalculia . . .) transition plans have been less than successful. In rural areas there are two primary reasons for this situation, these include the rural environment in which these students live and the qualification restrictions placed upon outside agencies that deliver services to students with mild disabilities.

The first barrier, the geographical location of the student, may appear to be insurmountable; but it does not need to be if a different method of service delivery for these students is considered. It is often the case high school graduates need to be willing/able to consider employment positions outside of their immediate community. At one time many high school students followed their parent's footsteps and readily accessed jobs (e.g., coal mining and farming). However, rural citizens have now realized they must travel to more populated areas to obtain employment. This poses a dilemma for *all* students but in particular the student with a disability. Because of the legislation identified above these students must have transition plans in place by age 16. In theory, these plans are to outline the necessary supports to guarantee the student makes a successful bridge from high school to the employment setting upon graduation. It is reasonable to assume that appropriate transition planning is more likely to occur in urban and suburban areas because there are simply more employment opportunities available. This is not the case in rural PA; therefore, these students need to be given direct job preparation and job experience while seniors in high school. By providing the opportunity for students to witness

and participate in the wide range of employment possibilities outside of their immediate community, the documented high unemployment rate for these individuals will decrease. No longer will high school seniors simply assume the only option available is the coal mining job that their parents worked at is available.

A second reason for inadequate transition planning in secondary schools is the limits placed upon outside agencies with respect to individuals with mild disabilities. These limitations do not impact students in urban areas because of the plethora of employment opportunities which exist. However, when social agencies are mandated to give priority to individuals with severe disabilities the negative impact is doubled when there are already few employment opportunities. For example, the State Vocational Rehabilitation and the State Mental Health/Mental Retardation Association have required schools to document that a student have a severe disability in order for ancillary services be made available. Therefore, an individual with moderate mental retardation will qualify for outside agency funding to assist with transition; whereas, the student with a learning disability receives no additional support. This inadequate support has likely contributed to the fact that "young adults with learning disabilities experience double the unemployment rates, are employed in lower status jobs, and earn lower salaries than their non-LD peers" (Smith et. al., 1997, pg. 228).

Exacerbating this second issue is the number of students with mild disabilities versus students with moderate/severe disabilities. National statistics report individuals with learning disabilities (i.e., mild disabilities) make up 51.1 percent of the entire population of students receiving special education services (Twentieth Annual Report to Congress, 1998). Thus, if legislation dictates transition services, it is unfair that the majority of individuals with disabilities are not able to access the services offered by outside agencies because funding stipulations target

only students with severe disabilities. Teachers and/or school administrators are not resistant to working with individuals with mild disabilities; schools merely face the reality of budgets and can only adequately serve students that funding patterns permit.

There are currently governmental agencies which exist in Indiana County to assist high school students with disabilities. However, constraints are placed upon each that limit the services provided.

Project Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives outlined in the original grant proposal are identified below.

Goal #1: To demonstrate to school administrators, teachers, and students that there exist employment opportunities for high school graduates with mild disabilities in rural settings.

1a: District administrators and teachers will be able to name four services provided by a supported employment provider.

1b: Students will be able to identify four different employers in Indiana County with whom they feel they would be qualified to work.

1c: School administrators will be able to identify four different businesses who are receptive to employing individuals with disabilities.

1d: Special education teachers will be able to describe supported employment and list its characteristics/components.

Goal #2: To expand the employers awareness of the meaningful contributions individuals with disabilities can make to their businesses.

2a: Employers will have the opportunity to work with 10 students with mild disabilities.

2b: Employers will have the opportunity to work with 10 potential employees at a younger age.

2c: Networking activities built into the grant will increase the number of businesses employing individuals with disabilities.

Goal #3: To train future professionals at IUP (i.e.: special education teachers, counselors, vocational rehabilitation specialists) about the variety of options that exist for students with disabilities.

3a: Interns in pre-professional training will learn how to complete task analysis of a specific job.

3b: Interns in pre-professional training will implement a behavior support plan with students in job settings.

3c: Interns in pre-professional training will be exposed to interagency collaboration by participating in advisory board meetings and project activities.

Goal #4: To improve job readiness skills and employment opportunities for high school seniors with disabilities in Indiana County.

4a: Students will be able to name four job opportunities both inside and outside of their school district boundaries.

4b: Students will be able to list their job interests and match them with their aptitudes and abilities.

4c: Students will perform job duties as directed by their employer with support as needed.

4d. Students will choose at least two businesses to shadow their interests.

Goal #5: To increase interagency collaboration among service providers to improve transition services for students with mild disabilities.

5a: Human service agencies which have traditionally focused on individuals with severe disabilities will have the opportunity to learn about the needs and characteristics of young adults with mild disabilities.

5b: Agencies will discuss employment outcomes for students with mild disabilities during regular Employment Council and Transition Council Meetings.

5b: School to Work Projects will increase their awareness of the supports needed for high school students with mild disabilities.

Research Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to assess the goals of this project. The qualitative data documents how this project has spurred interests about this student population that previously did not exist. This qualitative data is described below. The quantitative data collected involved conducting a follow-up survey of students and employers participating in the project. The actual survey and results can be found in Appendix A.

RESULTS

The results section of the report contains seven sections. These include: (a) policymaker awareness, (b) attitude change, (c) replication of project, (d) barriers to employment, (e) impact on pre-professionals, (f) infrastructure development, and (e) status of project goals.

Policymaker Awareness

Two area policymakers within the Pennsylvania General Assembly have learned first-hand about the project and the outcomes. Senator Patrick Stapleton was invited to the final advisory board meeting held in May, 1998. He heard a summary of the project and learned first-hand from parents and students about the impact it had on the students' high school experience. In addition, State Representative Sara Steelman attended a dissemination activity in June, 1998 where the partners of the grant were asked to provide a panel discussion to the Indiana County Supported Employment Council. It is worth noting that Representative Steelman made the attempt to attend the Supported Employment Council meeting since she serves on the

Transportation Subcommittee within the General Assembly. One should understand that transportation remains a barrier for many individuals seeking employment in Indiana County. The agendas for these two meetings can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to the first-hand feedback Senator Stapleton and Representative Steelman received, three members from the collaborative team on the project attended a forum in August, 1998 that explored interagency barriers that exist among current service agencies that assist individuals with disabilities. Two panel presentations have also been made at professional conferences held at Slippery Rock and Harrisburg during fall, 1998. Finally, and perhaps most significant, is what currently is occurring with a similar program with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). The OVR offices in Johnstown and Dubois have met with the Project Director and the Associate Executive Director of ICW to discuss how the project could be replicated for adults with mild disabilities. Twenty-two referrals have been made to the Johnstown OVR office and 13 referrals have been sent to the Dubois OVR office. These referrals were made because of the information sharing completed by ICW Employment Services. While these potential clients are adults, *a population that was not served under this grant funded project*, it appears that policymakers are recognizing the benefits of providing supported employment assistance to a population that has in the past been overlooked (i.e., individuals with mild disabilities). The current status of the individuals referred to OVR is unavailable. However, ICW Employment Services has indicated the number of OVR referrals in general to their agency has increased significantly as a result of this project.

Attitude Change

In addition to the OVR activities described above, two work-groups have been created to develop similar programs that focus on high school students with mild disabilities. ICW

Employment Services has submitted a proposal to the Tri-County PIC. The proposal sought funds to support 10 students with mild disabilities at the rate of $1800.00/student. The status of the proposal is pending; however, such activities did not take place prior to this project. In March, 1999 the project director was informed that no funding would be provided to ICW Employment Services during the current fiscal year because of the current change in funding streams for employment agencies such as Tri-County PIC. The second work-group has been established in a neighboring county. Staff at United Cerebral Palsy-Ford City, which serves communities in Armstrong County, has contacted the Project Director to examine how to replicate this project. Finally, the Project Director was invited to become a member of the School-To-Work Advisory Board of Indiana County. This is significant since many of the activities conducted for students with mild disabilities associated with this grant should actually be funded through school-to-work activities.

In addition to the outgrowth projects that have occurred during the last six months, the Indiana County Transition Council continues to meet and discuss the changes that need to occur if such a program is to continue for high school students with mild disabilities. Changes discussed include having transportation listed as a "related service" on students individual education plans and the need for schools to provide job coaching services. This transition council includes high school transition coordinators; these individuals are responsible for discussing transition activities for students with disabilities in their respective schools. The majority of transition coordinators are high school guidance counselors. Although these individuals work diligently to plan for post-high school activities for students with disabilities; they are not required to be certified in special education. Therefore, the types of activities planned often mirrors what is done for students without an identified disability. This project

clearly demonstrated that some level of support (i.e., job preparation, job shadowing, job coaching) is a key ingredient to the success of young adults with mild disabilities. This being said, the principal investigator firmly believes that the more knowledgeable the high school counselors become, the more likely change will occur in their home schools. Finally, the Project Director has made site visits to Indiana Area High School, Marion Center Area High School, and Punxsutawney Area High School to explain the results of this project to high school special education teachers and counselors. They have all been receptive to the project and would like to explore future collaborative partnerships to serve this student population.

Replication of Project

Upon completion of this one-year project, several ideas have surfaced regarding replicating the project in the future. The Project Director would highly encourage the following entities be involved if a similar project is to be undertaken in other areas of the state. It is paramount that several entities collaborate and communicate with one another to assure appropriate services are provided. Therefore, the suggestions listed below are directed toward the following: a) high school special education teachers, b) high school transition coordinators, c) high school administrators, d) children with disabilities and their parents, e) supported employment agencies, and finally, f) area transition councils throughout the state of PA.

- Become active in the school-to-work initiatives in your particular area. Learn what they are currently doing for students in general. Furthermore, how the approach for general education students is different than for students with mild disabilities.
- Inform parents of their child's rights regarding transition services for students with disabilities. Each child with a disability is required to have a transition plan written by age

16 in the state of PA. If parents are assertive they can have transportation listed as a related service in their child's transition plan. This was (and continues to be) a major barrier.

- Involve the high school special education teacher that is responsible for managing the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Once they understand the benefits of providing the services delivered in this project, they will likely investigate creative ways within their own school to make such transition activities occur.
- If a school is relatively close to a college (i.e., two-year or four-year) investigate the use of volunteers to conduct job shadowing and job coaching aspects of the program. It was learned as this project progressed that Ameri-Corps college students could be utilized in such a fashion. A disadvantage to this approach is the lack of continuity of job coaches.
- Utilize the Transition Council that has been established for your area. Each county within the state should have created a Transition Council.

Barriers to Employment

A significant barrier for the student population involved with this project remains transportation. If one can involve the parents when their child is 14 years of age this barrier could be partially broken down. The parent could request that transportation be provided as a related service in the child's IEP. This would permit the student to arrive on the job site for job shadowing and coaching experiences. However, upon high school graduation, the individual will still need to access transportation to arrive at the job site. Therefore, the transportation issue could be resolved partially when the child is still in school if it is listed as a related service on the IEP. However, during the final years of high school plans should be developed by the individual to purchase a vehicle, investigate car-pooling options, or access public transportation.

One may ask why transportation is not currently being listed in students IEP's? The answer is not simple. It is an undisputed fact that transportation is a "related service" that is to be provided if the IEP team deems necessary. However, individuals representing schools (i.e., high school transition coordinators and special education teachers) are reluctant to suggest transportation because this would place an additional financial burden on the school's budget. Parents and/or the student may request transportation but too often they are unaware that it may be requested. In theory, schools should inform parents of all potential options but this is not occurring. *The principal investigator would suggest that state policy makers explore mechanisms to improve the likelihood that transportation becomes a reality for high school juniors and seniors who need to explore employment options as part of their IEP's.*

As one reviews the results of the student survey, they will note that students rated the pre-employment classes quite beneficial. Therefore, high school teachers must become better acquainted about the benefits that pre-employment classes can have on students. It is the Project Director's belief that providing instruction will not only make the student more successful obtaining employment, but will also result in the student remaining in school instead of exiting the system early because the school is not meeting the child's educational needs. There is pending legislation in the PA General Assembly that will mandate all educators to continue to grow professionally by attending in-service and/or enrolling in graduate courses. It would be ideal if special educators would seize such opportunties to update their knowledge in the area of transition. Although transition services have been mandated since 1990, many current special educators received their certification prior to this date. It should be noted that most college and universities that prepare special educators offer courses in transition for current special education graduates. Therefore, the mechanism is in place; current practitioners simply need to seek out

this information by engaging in appropriate professional development activities (i.e., graduate courses on transition).

Impact on Pre-Professionals

The Project Director asked the lead graduate student involved with the project to complete this section of the final report. Ms. Marianne Jablunovsky, a December graduate at IUP in the Department of Special Education, provided the following data.

Goals for Pre-Professional Educators: At the advent of grant activities, the following goals were defined relative to pre-professional educators (PPEs).

- PPEs will design and implement instruction for high school students with mild disabilities relative to pre-employment skills.
- PPEs will be trained to be job coaches and will successfully serve in this capacity during job shadowing and job internship project phases.
- PPEs will collaborate with public/vocational school and human service agency personnel throughout all three-project phases.
- PPEs will assist in post-project data collection.
- PPEs will participate in post-project dissemination activities to include presentations at professional conferences and writing for publication in a professional journal(s).

Outcomes for/Accomplishments of Pre-Professional Educators: to date, all of the above goals have either been realized or are in progress.

- Three pre-professional educators were engaged in designing and implementing pre-employment skills instruction. PPEs gained experience in small group and one-on-one instruction, and in disseminating information relative to job applications, resumes, interviewing skills, communication skills, etc.

- Three PPE's worked with job developers at ICW Employment Services to learn about the responsibilities of a job coach. One PPE worked with a total of three students in the role of a job coach during the job shadowing and job internship phases. Two PPEs had the opportunity to complete student observations during the internship phase.
- Three PPEs collaborated with ICW Employment Services personnel on a routine basis. In addition, one PPE routinely collaborated with members of the Advisory Board, the Steering Committee, ARIN IU #28 personnel, public school teachers, Indiana County Area Vo-Tech personnel, and parents throughout the entire project.
- One PPE conducted follow-up interviews, approximately six months after grant activities concluded and analyzed data resulting from these interviews.
- One PPE participated in two professional conference presentations, and is currently involved in the preparation of a professional article to be submitted for publication.

Academic/Professional Impact of Project on PPEs: Ways in which the project is believed to Have impacted PPEs academically and professionally are explained in the following.

Academically:

- PPEs performance in a Collaboration and a Transition course was positively impacted due to knowledge and skills acquired during this project.
- PPEs knowledge acquired from two Research courses was extended and applied during data collection/reporting phase which occurred post-project.
- PPEs knowledge acquired form a Learning Disabilities course was extended and applied during all three-project phases.
- PPEs knowledge acquired form Methods and Instructional Design course was extended and applied during the Pre-Employment Skills Class preparation and implementation.

Professionally:

- Due to the emphasis upon transition in t he most recent Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997), employers seek teachers with knowledge and experience in this aspect of special education. All three PPEs are better able to meet this professional demand because of their participation in this project.
- Transition planning for students ages 14 and older involves a collaborative relationship to be established between students, parents, teachers, and adult service agencies. The PPEs who participated in this project have gained similar collaborative experiences which will be an asset to them in their prospective professional environments.
- Job coaching experience has impacted PPEs in such a way as to indicate to them the need for high school special education programming to focus not only upon academic areas, but also upon social, self-advocacy, communication, and time-management skills of students.
- Follow-up interviewing and data analysis completed by one of the PPEs is, also, professionally relevant. It extends the PPE's professional capabilities to include researching skills. In addition, this aspect has a positive professional ramification given the prospect of further graduate study.

Infrastructure Development

As a result of this one-year project, the prospects for future collaborative projects with community agencies has clearly been enhanced. A brief description of current and potential collaborative endeavors are cited below.

- The Project Director co-submitted a plan to the Dubois and Johnstown OVR offices to replicate this project for adults with mild disabilities. The result of this was an increase in the number of referrals for adults with moderate (not mild) disabilities.

- The Project Director has been contacted by the United Cerebral Palsy Association located in Ford City to explore potential collaborative partnerships.
- A work-group has been formed in Indiana County to explore replication possibilities of this project. As a result, a proposal was submitted to Tri-County PIC for job coaching services.
- The Project Director has been invited to become a member of the Indiana County School-To-Work Advisory Board.
- The Project Director has been assigned a course at IUP that requires students to complete field-based experiences with students with disabilities. There is potential that these college students could be used as job coaches if area schools desire to create transition activities such as those provided by this grant.
- A colleague at IUP that served on the advisory board for this project has become an active member of the Indiana Transition Council. Furthermore, she was nominated to serve as co-chair of the council in December.

Status of Project Goals

Four of the five project goals outlined above have been met. It is the Project Director's view that Goal #1 could not be realized because the area school district's budgets and calendars did not match the calendar and contract dates of the funding agency. While this was a factor beyond everyone's control, the impact was minimized because the Indiana County Vo-Tech was willing to become the predominate high school to participate in the project. It should be noted that IUP was notified on September 29, 1997 about the status of the proposal and the contract started November 1, 1997. These dates were well into the school calendar and adjustment to students' schedules and arrangement of transportation became obstacles. However, the collaborative spirit exhibited by all partners minimized this potential obstacle. Therefore, only

objective 1b was realized under goal #1. The remaining objectives under Goal #1 were realized with only one administrator and one special education teacher.

Each of the objectives listed in Goal #2 were realized. As one reviews the survey data found in Appendix A and the agenda for the May Advisory Board (Appendix B), it will become evident the project surpassed this particular goal. The status of Goal #3 is outlined above under the Impact on Pre-Professionals section. Goal #4 was also realized. Evidence of this has been supplied in past progress reports to the agency. In addition, please see the student survey data that is included in Appendix A. Finally, Goal #5 was realized. The Project Director is being welcomed at community meetings that involve service providers for individuals with disabilities. The specific meetings and activities have been cited earlier in this report.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the positive feedback provided by the collaborative partners, the students, and parents, the Project Director felt this was a successful grant funded activity. Furthermore, the number of out-growth activities that resulted from this one-year project has been encouraging in terms of replication and/or institutionalization of the project. Based on this one-year project, the following recommendations have been made:

- It is recommended that the School-To-Work Board at the state level examine how school-to-work activities that are conducted for the general education population differ from those designed for students with mild disabilities (learning disabilities). Based on this project's findings there does need to be a distinction. That being said, it is important that one not generalize a program for students with disabilities. For example, students with severe disabilities gain work/community based experiences through community based instruction; however, community based instruction is generally not appropriate for students with mild

disabilities. In summary, students with mild disabilities need support that is different than what is provided by current School-to-Work initiatives but it should not resemble community based instruction.

- The Bureau of Special Education within the Pennsylvania Department of Education should explore methods that will encourage high school special education teachers to plan and deliver pre-employment classes to high school students with disabilities. Furthermore, these teachers need to learn about and understand the benefits of providing job shadowing and job coaching experiences for students with mild disabilities. This could be done by the Bureau issuing a memorandum encouraging all current special education teachers to update their knowledge base relative to coordinating appropriate transition activities for students with disabilities. The Bureau could also create a special certification endorsement for high school teachers/counselors that indicates they have received advanced transition planning for students with disabilities. Such a teaching certificate endorsement is available in some states.
- While not directly related to the Bureau of Special Education, the Higher Education Initiative could become involved. This state agency provides funds to encourage partnerships between teacher preparation colleges/universities and K-12 schools. Their annual grants program could have a targeted area related to transition and employment training for students with disabilities. They regularly provide $10,000 grants to enhance collaborative efforts in PA.
- Currently the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation serves individuals with disabilities after they exit high school (i.e., age 18). The types of services include: job coaches, supported employment, career counseling, and assistive devices. Because these services are instrumental in ensuring adults with disabilities are able to fully participate in our society,

OVR should be permitted to work with young adults with mild disabilities prior to the age of 18. In addition, students with mild disabilities usually do not qualify for OVR services because they do not have the label: most severely disabled, which usually excludes individuals with learning disabilities. The method of determining eligibility for OVR needs to be examined to reflect the demographics of all individuals with disabilities (i.e., students with learning disabilities constitute 51% of all students with disabilities).

- High school administrators need to be made aware that transportation is a legitimate related service that may be requested/listed on a child's individual education plan. Transportation budgets should reflect this as it appears transporting a child from the school to the job-site is a major barrier.
- Established parent groups and networks throughout the state should be informed about the wide range of transition activities that can be requested. Too often transition activities focus only on students with severe disabilities.
- Based on the evaluation data collected from students and employers, the project director would recommend extending the amount of time of the pre-employment classes. One method that special education teachers could do this would be to infuse job preparation skills throughout the year and integrate them into the curriculum they already teach to students. For example, during language arts lessons when students are practicing writing skills, have them create a sample cover letter and/or resume for a prospective employer.

In summary, this pilot project was deemed very successful for the students involved. The principal investigator continues to receive calls about the details of the program. If the recommendations outlined above could be implemented, students with mild disabilities living in

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rural areas of the state would be provided a much richer secondary education that would enhance their post-high school options.

References

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Appendix A

Follow-Up Survey Results from

Students and Employers

The Improvement of Employment Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Upon High School Graduation in Rural Settings

STUDENT FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

1. Why did you choose to participate in the "Employment Opportunities..." project?

2. How important was it for you to have an "on-the-job" experience before you graduated from high school?

   A Very Important
   B Somewhat Important
   C Not Important
   D Other

3. Which of the following job skills, which were discussed during the "Employment Opportunities" project do you feel that you have learned and have already used or will use in the future?

   A How to complete a job application
   B How to write a resume
   C How to act during an interview
   D How to dress for an interview
   E How to write a follow-up letter to a company with whom you have interviewed

4. Why do you think that job shadowing was a part of the "Employment Opportunities..." project?

5. What did you learn during your shadowing experiences (For example, I learned that I liked an institutional food service work environment more than a small delicatessen work environment.)

6. Do you think that other students could benefit from job shadowing?

   A Yes
   B No
   C Unsure

   Explain reasons for your answer.

7. Describe to me job-specific skills that you used or learned for the first time during your internship experience (e.g., how to read an inventory sheet, how to write a lesson plan, how to plan a snack menu for pre-schoolers, etc.).

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8. Who, among the following individuals, did you communicate with during your internship experience?

A Job coach
B Job supervisor
C Colleagues at my job
D I did not communicate with any of these individuals during my internship experience.

9. With whom did you **most frequently** communicate?

A Job coach
B Job supervisor
C Co-workers
D I did not communicate with any of these individuals during my internship experience.

10. What did you talk about with the person who you communicated with most frequently (e.g., I talked about job tasks and asked questions about them., I talked about my friends and family., I talked about my personal problems.)

11. Which of the following did you observe among your co-workers and supervisors during your intercept experience?

A Greeting one another (saying hello, how are you, good-bye)
B Speaking clearly when talking to one another
C Looking at one another when speaking
D Standing or sitting at comfortable distances from each other when having a conversation

12. Did any problems with your job coach, supervisor and/or co-workers arise during our internship?

A Yes
B No
C Unsure

If a problem arose, describe what you did at that time.

13. Which statement best describes your opinion about having a job coach?

A It was valuable to have a job coach in order to be successful.
B It was not valuable to have a job coach in order to be successful.
C I am unsure how I felt about the value of the job coach.

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14. When you think about the three phases of the project, pre-employment skills class, job shadowing, and job internship, which phase or what parts of the phases were the ***most valuable*** to you when you think about what you are doing now and what you plan to do with your future?

15. When you think about the three phases of the project, pre-employment skills class, job shadowing, and job internship, which phase or what parts of the phases were the ***most invaluable*** to you when you think about what you are doing now and what you plan to do with your future?

16. Have your career or educational goals changed due to your participation in this project?

    A Yes
    B No
    C Unsure

17. What did you plan to do with your future before you participated in this project?

18. What do you plan to do with your future now?

19. Did you talk about careers or do any career exploration prior to this project?

    A Yes
    B No
    C Unsure

If you answered Yes, please explain the activities in which you participated.

20. Would you recommend this "Employment Opportunities..." project to other students?

    A Yes
    B No
    C Unsure

Please explain your answer.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

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The Improvement of Employment Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Upon High School Graduation in Rural Settings

EMPLOYER FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

1. Why did you choose to participate in the "Employment Opportunities..." project?

1A. How did you foresee that this project would be beneficial to your place of business?

2. Which component(s) of this program made students employable in your business?

   A Student had pre-employment skills training
   B Student had vocational skills training in a specific field
   C Student was supported by a job coach
   D Student was additional human resource at no expense to my business (Students were paid through ICW Employment Services.)
   E Other

3. Given your participation in the project, do you feel that persons with mild disabilities may have capabilities that can contribute to the growth of your business?

   A Yes
   B No
   C Unsure

   Please explain your answer.

4. What factors (consider both student variables and the business needs and financial and production interests) were or would need to be in place in order to extend an internship experience into permanent part- or full-time employment?

5. Given this "Employment Opportunities..." project, what were the primary ***barriers*** to extending the internship into a permanent employment experience within the company?

6. How can educators/schools better equip students to be successful in the workplace?

7. How might educators/schools reduce the barriers which exist between internships and permanent employment?

8. How might agencies who service individuals with mild disabilities reduce the barriers which exist between internships and permanent employment?

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Summary Quantitative Data from follow-up interviews:

Student Data:

- 50% of students participated because they saw project as opportunity to get job experience.
- 75% of students felt that it was very important to have an on-the-job experience prior to high school graduation
- 100% of the students agreed that they learned how to complete a job application, how to act during an interview, and how to dress for an interview during the course of the project. 88% indicated that they learned to write a resume, and 75% indicated that they learned how to write a follow-up thank you letter after a job interview
- 63% indicated that the shadowing experience was designed to help them to learn about different types of jobs, and 63% indicated that shadowing resulted in their being able to better identify their personal job preferences. 88% of the students believed that job shadowing was a beneficial part of this project. One student indicated that shadowing would be even more valuable if it was more of a "hands-on" experience and less uninvolved observation.
- 75% of the students indicated that they learned new job-specific skills during the internship phase of the project. One student also identified learning problem solving skills and one student indicated that he did not learn any new skills.
- 100% of the students indicated that they routinely communicated with their job coach and their co-workers during the internship phase. 75% of the students indicated routine communication with their job supervisors. 50% of the students indicated that they communicated most frequently with their job coach. 100% of the students indicated that they conversed about job-related issues with their job coach and 88% stated that they also conversed about personal issues.
- 75% of the students indicated that it was valuable to have a job coach in their effort to be successful. 25% of the students were unsure about the value of the job coach to their success.
- 63% of the students cited the pre-employment skills class as the most valuable phase of the project. 63% indicated that job shadowing was the least valuable phase.

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- 38% of the students said that participation in the project changed their career/educational goals. Of these three students, two indicated that they now [after the project] desired to get additional post-secondary training and one was able to better articulate the specific job which he desired.

- 88% of the student indicated that they had done career exploration prior to this project, however, the activities they named were one time experiences which appeared to lack in intensity. Activities students named included meeting with a guidance counselor, attending career fairs and fieldtrips to job sites, and regular and special education classroom activities. The highest percentage of students reported guidance counselor meetings and special education classroom activities (38% for both).

- 100% of the students indicated that they would recommend this project to other students. 88% indicated that they would tell other students that this is a good job-learning/job-training experience. Two students said that they would tell other students that they would learn how to communicate and how to perform on a job interview by participating in this project.

Current status of student respondents
8/10 students responded (80%)

- Five individuals are employed part-time, one is unemployed and two are attending a post-secondary educational program on a full-time basis.

- Four of the five employed students are working in settings commensurate with their training and career goals. The two attending school are enrolled in programs commensurate with their training and career goals.

- Overall, five of all eight students remain dependent upon others for their transportation needs. The remaining three students maintain drivers licenses, and two own their own cars.

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Employer Data:

- 43% of the employers participated in project due to the quality reputation of the employment agency which was contracted to develop jobs and provide job coaches. 29% also indicated that they saw project as a community service opportunity and an additional 29% indicated that they believed in helping high school students. 14% saw the venture as good for public relations and an additional 14% perceived the pilot program to be a quality effort in which they wanted to be involved.

- 57% of the employers reported that staff issues (anxiety, time to train) were the most typical barriers to the employment of high school students with mild disabilities which were not issues for this project, given the way that it was structured, [primarily the fact that a job coach would be accompanying the student to the workplace]. 43% indicated liability and insurance issues as typical barriers which were not an issue during this project, because ICW [employment agency] maintained these responsibilities. 29% stated that there are no typical barriers.

- The majority of employers (43%) indicated that they perceived the project as benefiting their businesses, because additional human resources, which were needed, would be supplied.

- 100% of the employers indicated that the fact that students had pre-employment skills training classes made them more employable, 86% cited vocational skills training as making students more employable, 71% indicated job coach support as making student more employable and 57% indicated the fact that the student was paid for by ICW [employment service agency] made the student more employable.

- 6/7 or 86% of the employers indicated that they now [at project's conclusion] perceive students with mild disabilities as individuals who can contribute to the growth of their businesses. They indicated that these students could follow directions, produce quality work, work independently, demonstrate ambition, and ask questions and communicate effectively. 1/7 or 14% of the employers did not believe that students with mild disabilities could benefit his business. This employer indicated however, that attributes of the individual matched to his business led to this answer. He indicated her to be an irresponsible employee, who failed to show for scheduled work hours, and often called off of work.

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- 29% of the employers said that current needs and budgeting restraints were primary in their inability to extend internships into permanent employment. Other issues cited included, student not having transportation, student and work-site variables. One employer indicated that the internship was extended into a permanent position.

- 71% of the employers felt that students need to be better trained [during pre-employment skills classes] in the area of time-management, 57% indicated that in addition to time-management, communication skills need to be further addressed, 14% indicated risk-taking skills, 43% indicated job specific skills and 14% indicated personal responsibility taking as areas to be covered with students prior to their internship experiences.

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Appendix B

Agendas from Meetings

A special thank you is extended to the Advisory Board Members and Mr. John Johnson at IUP who have volunteered their time to assure the project was a success. In addition, numerous businesses in the community have recognized the need to provide employment opportunities for diverse learners from area high schools. Businesses that participated in grant activities include:

Aarone's Body Shop
ARAMARK at IUP
Anthony's Farm
Beacon Day Care
B & M Construction
CNC Construction
Colonial Motor Mart
Crep's High Technology
Delaney's Chevrolet
Giant Eagle
Holiday Inn
Hoss's Steak & Sea House
Indiana Hospital
ICW Employment Services
Indiana County Headstart
Indiana County Child Day Care Program
Kinko's Copies
Robert L. Kimball Architects and Engineers Inc.
Roseann's Everyday Gourmet
Rustic Lodge
Terry McDowell's Day Care
Warren Peter Construction

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Advisory Board Meeting and Recognition Dinner

Collaborative Partnership
ARIN IU#28
Indiana County Vo-Tech
ICW Employment Services
Indiana University of PA

May 13, 1998
Breezedale Library
IUP Campus

ARMSTRONG AND INDIANA
MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL RETARDATION PROGRAM
ARMSDALE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
R.D. 8 BOX 293
KITTANNING, PENNSYLVANIA 16201

Tel. (412) 548-3451
Kittanning

Tel. (412) 349-3350
TDD(412) 465-3800
Indiana

May 28, 1998

Dear Advisory Council Member:

The next meeting of the Indiana County Supported Employment Advisory Council is scheduled for **Tuesday, June 16, 1998** at a **new** location: **The Indiana Holiday Inn** on Wayne Avenue. Also please note that we will be meeting at a different time: **8:30 a.m.**

The Holiday Inn provides a breakfast buffet for **$5.00** per person. We plan to eat breakfast while we meet as a time saving measure.

The Program Committee has planned a very interesting panel discussion for this meeting. The topic is: "Transitioning from School to Employment" and focuses on the recent Collaborative Partnership Grant involving ARIN IU #28, Indiana County Vo-Tech, ICW Employment Services and IUP. Members of the panel will include: Diane Sobolewski, ARIN; Trudy Peterman, Vo-Tech; Tracey Howard, ICW; Dr. Kent Jackson (who directed the Grant) IUP; Many Ann Duncan, Giant Eagle; Gary Costello, CNC Construction; Sam Marshall, student participant and Mrs. Marshall, parent. As usual, there will be time allotted to answer questions. The meeting will conclude at **10:00** a.m.

Please feel free to invite additional individuals who may be interested in this presentation. Those of us who participated in the Grant are excited to have the opportunity to share this information and hope to see it expand in the future.

We thank each of you for your continued support and look forward to seeing you on June 16th. Please R.S.V.P. to (724) 349-4143 by **Thursday, June 11, 1998**.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Dragani

Patricia A. Dragani
Associate Executive Director
ICW Vocational Services, Inc.

Joseph Bujdos, Acting Administrator
Armstrong/Indiana MH/MR Program

PAD/nb

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Program

5:30-6:00: Gathering

6:00-7:00: Welcome and Dinner, John Johnson

Purpose of Gathering, John Johnson

Description of Program, Kent Jackson

Employer Reflections:
- Ed Bratton, Giant Eagle
- Gary Costillo, CNC Construction

Student Reflections:
- Jeremy Clawson
- Sam Marshall
- Hope Miller

Parent Reflections:
- Ms. Miller
- Mr. & Mrs. Marshall

Certificates of Appreciation:
- Tracy Howard, ICW Employment Services
- Marianne Jablunovsky, IUP's Department of Special Ed.
- Michelina Olmstead, Indiana County Vo-Tech School

Remarks:
- Kent Jackson, Assistant Professor of Special Education, IUP
- Pat Dragani, Associate Executive Director for ICW Vocational Services
- Diane Sobolewski, Transition Consultant for ARIN IU#28

Closing Comments:
- Dr. Mark Staszkiewicz, Provost at IUP
- Senator Stapleton, Board of Directors, Center for Rural PA

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, A legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly provided grant funding for this project. The project's title: *The Improvement of Employment Opportunities for Students Upon High School Graduation in Rural Settings*.

Advisory Board Members for this grant include:

Freddie Ashbaugh, Job Developer for ICW Employment Services
Tom Dembosky, Manager for the Indiana Job Center
Sandy Dudash, Transition Coordinator for Homer-Center S.D.
Dianne Ferrell, Assistant Professor of Special Education, IUP
Laurie Filitske, Parent Coordinator for Parent Information Project
Carol Fry, Coordinator of School to Work for Indiana County
Tracy Howard, Administrative Job Coach, ICW Employment Services
Marianne Jablunovsky, Graduate Assistant in Special Education at IUP
Jim Kinneer, Human Resources Generalist of Indiana Hospital
Lynn McNabb, Transition Coordinator for Indiana School District
Tom Mittelhouser, Director of Human Resources at IUP
Michelina Olmstead, Cooperative Education Coordinator, Indiana County Vo-Tech
Frank Palilla, Transition Coordinator for Marion Center S.D.
Trudy Peterman, Principal at Indiana Area Vo-Tech
Fran Prezant, Director of Parent Information Project
Karen Ruda, Transition Coordinator for Blairsville High School
Ed Ruffner, Member of the PA State Board for School to Work

Appendix C

Media Associated with Grant

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FOCUSING ON JOBS

Employment opportunities for young adults with disabilities after they graduate from high school was the focus of a recent project co-sponsored by four local agencies.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the Indiana County Workshop, Armstrong-Indiana Intermediate Unit 28 and the Indiana County Vocational-Technical School designed a training program that helped high school students with disabilities identify and secure a job they wanted after graduation.

Dr. Kent Jackson, left, of IUP's special education department headed up the program. The program was funded through a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and in-kind contributions of participants.

During a recognition dinner held recently at IUP's Breezedale hall to honor program participants, Jackson recognized Marianne Jablunovsky, center left, of IUP's special education department; Tracey Howard center, of ICW with participation certificates. Mary Kandray, center right, program director for grants at the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and state Sen. Patrick Stapleton (D-41st) also attended the dinner.

(IUP photo) [10]

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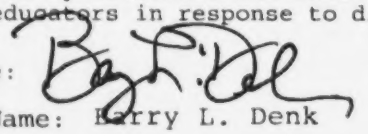
Signature: 

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